

THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGES: THE RISE OF ICONS AND CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION*

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INTRODUCTION

ONE has to be brave to return to the subject of Byzantine Iconoclasm, a subject which, we may feel, has been done to death.¹ But the division in Byzantine society which lasted off and on for over a century, from 726 to the 'restoration of orthodoxy' in 843, was so profound that any Byzantine historian must at some time try to grapple with it. This is especially so if one is trying to understand the immediately preceding period, from the Persian invasions of the early seventh century to the great sieges of Constantinople by the Arabs in 674–8 and 717. It is well recognized by historians that this was a time of fundamental social, economic, and administrative change, which coincided with, but was by no means wholly caused by, the loss of so much Byzantine territory to the Arabs.² However, the connection, if any, of this process of change with the social and religious upheaval known as Iconoclasm still leaves much to be said; indeed, no simple connection is likely in itself to provide an adequate explanation. In this paper I want to explore further some of the background to the crisis, without attempting here to provide a general

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¹ See, for instance, Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds, *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977); D. Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung in die 40er Jahre des 8 Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1980); S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain, 1973) and *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V* (Louvain, 1978); A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme byzantin* (Paris, 1957); Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold* (London, 1985).

² See now John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), with his earlier articles 'Some remarks on the background to the Iconoclast Controversy', *Byzantine Studies*, 38 (1977), pp. 161–84, and especially 'Ideology and social change in the seventh century: military discontent as a barometer', *Klio*, 68 (1986), pp. 139–90; Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900–1200* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 15–34. The contrasting view (emphasizing continuity) put forward by W. E. Kaegi, Jr., 'Visible Rates of Seventh-century Change', in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, eds, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, Wisc., 1989), pp. 191–208, depends mainly on institutional and military evidence from the reign of Heraclius itself and does not conflict with the perception of profound change over a longer period (see further below).

explanation for Iconoclasm itself. I shall not venture beyond the first phase of Iconoclasm, which ended with the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, and after which the argument is somewhat different. Indeed, I shall be focusing here not even on the period known as 'first Iconoclasm', but mainly on the preceding period, when the issues inherent in the controversy were already, and increasingly, making themselves felt. Though we shall inevitably be concerned with some of the arguments brought against icons by their opponents, it is the place of images themselves in the context of the pre-Iconoclastic period which will be the main issue. Finally, while I want to offer a different way of reading the rise of icons, I do not pretend that it is the only one, or even possibly the most important. I do suggest, though, that it can help us to make sense of some of the issues that were involved.

It is clear that the suspicion of religious images which took such an extreme form in Byzantine Iconoclasm followed a period of intense questioning about the legitimacy of Christian representation.³ In 691, for example, the well-known canon 82 of the Council in Trullo forbade the representation of Christ as a lamb or otherwise in symbolic form; he was to be depicted only in human form, so that 'we may recall to memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.' Here I should like to broaden the enquiry beyond the immediate iconographical issue. The first part of the paper will argue that in the period of the 'rise of icons', from the later sixth to the eighth centuries, religious images, which were held by iconophiles to represent objective truth, came to be seen as one of the guarantors of knowledge, and were thus an important component in the evolving belief system of Byzantine society at the time.

One of the functions of religion as a cultural system is to provide a way of making sense of the disasters, injustices, and problems with which people are faced in the world. At this time there were indeed many reasons for uncertainty. First, the period from, say, the late sixth century to the beginnings of Iconoclasm (conventionally set in 726) was precisely the time during which Classical Antiquity finally did become Byzantium. The Greek cities, which until the sixth century had still been the centres of culture and education, were either devastated by invasion or else turned into medieval towns. With them went much of the old educational system, and, with it, access to classical books. By the eighth century it was

³ See on this Charles Barber, 'The Koimesis Church, Nicaea. The limits of representation on the eve of Iconoclasm', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 41 (1991), pp. 43–60.

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a difficult thing to get hold of a classical text even in Constantinople itself, let alone the provinces, and in any case, attention was directed to more immediate concerns elsewhere. Of course, one can exaggerate. But it seems that even educated people now had little idea of their past history beyond legend and fantasy. As for the classical statues which still survived in large numbers even in the shrunken city of eighth-century Constantinople, they were often misidentified, misunderstood, and more often feared as potentially dangerous.⁴ During this Byzantine Dark Age, Classical Antiquity was no longer part of the average consciousness.

The reign of the Emperor Heraclius (610–41) probably saw the last manifestation of traditional learning for many years to come. During that period scholarly history was still possible, as were classicizing art, epic poetry, and philosophy; by contrast, the next period is so ill-documented that it was hardly known to the chronicler Theophanes or the Patriarch Nicephorus, to whom we owe the basic Byzantine historical accounts.⁵ Classicizing literary forms are not to be found again for nearly three centuries, not until after the end of Iconoclasm and the establishment of a new dynasty in Constantinople. Heraclius's reign also saw tremendous reversals: difficult but successful wars against Persia, followed closely by the loss of most of the eastern provinces of the Empire to the Arabs. In the course of these events the holy city of Jerusalem, the location of the True Cross, was lost, regained, and lost again within the space of twenty-five years. The reign ended in a confusion of religious division. The mental dislocation caused by all this can hardly be exaggerated.⁶

Heraclius's campaigns against the Persians were accompanied by a marked amount of eschatological propaganda; affecting as they did the eastern provinces which were to be the focus and crucible for religious change on a scale as yet undreamt of by the unfortunate Byzantines, they stimulated deep soul-searching, expectation, and then disappointment among the local populations.⁷ I shall argue here that as well as representing

⁴ For a fascinating range of examples, see Cyril Mango, 'Antique statuary and the Byzantine beholder', *DOP*, 17 (1963), pp. 53–75.

⁵ See the discussion in Cyril Mango, ed., *Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople. Short History* (Washington, DC, 1990), pp. 12–18.

⁶ See also Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), ch. 6, and 'New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature, 7th–8th Centuries', in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material = Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 1 (Princeton, 1991), pp. 81–105.

⁷ See Michael Whitby, 'Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Vitality', in Cameron and Conrad, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, pp. 25–80, with the papers by G. J. Reinink and Han Drijvers in the same volume.

a revival of the Church's own longstanding hesitation about religious images, Iconoclasm was a manifestation of an uncertainty which people felt about their own thought-world. As for the extreme proliferation of religious images itself, together with the massive amount of attention which is given to them in the literature of the seventh century onwards, this can be read in its Byzantine context as part of the replacement for the lost horizons of Classical Antiquity, and indeed as part of an urge to assert a new authority.⁸ Images form part of the intellectual framework round which we can see Byzantium reorientating itself. They are an important element in a sign-system through which knowledge, no longer accessible in the old way, could still be reliably assessed. Yet the implications of such a realignment were not to be fully realized or accepted without a profound struggle, of which the seventh century reveals many indications; to be aware of its extent, we have only to look at the anxious canons of the Quinisext Council of 691–2, or at some of the question-and-answer literature from the seventh century, which may be taken to reflect contemporary concerns. When official Iconoclasm began, even though it seems to have been mainly imposed from the top and to have lacked real popular support, the religious divisions which it opened up were often bitter and hard to resolve. Moreover, they happened against a background of equally profound administrative, social, and economic change, in the course of which Byzantium shed the structures still remaining from Classical Antiquity and adopted the medieval appearance of the Middle Byzantine State.⁹ But having passed through this painful phase, of which Iconoclasm was the culmination, Byzantium can clearly be seen from the ninth century onwards to be entering a phase of renewed confidence and to have found a level of integration which was to permit advances in new directions.

It is mainly during the late sixth and seventh centuries that the veneration of icons seems to have taken off in Byzantium. Few pre-Iconoclastic icons have survived the efforts of the Iconoclasts (the most famous and striking examples come from the monastery on Mount Sinai); nevertheless, the visual evidence that we do have is sufficiently scattered geo-

⁸ For this emphasis (against 'decline'), see Robin Cormack, 'Byzantine Aphrodisias. Changing the symbolic map of a city', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Association*, 216, ns 36 (1990), pp. 26–41.

⁹ This is particularly stressed by Haldon: see n. 2 above, and for signs of ideological dislocation, see also G. Dagron, 'Le Saint, le savant, l'astrologue. Étude de thèmes hagiographiques à travers quelques recueils de "Questions et réponses des Ve-VIIe siècles"', in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés (IVe-VIIe s.)* (Paris, 1981), pp. 143–55; for administrative change see F. Winkelmann, *Byzantinische Rang- und Ämterstruktur im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert = Berliner byzantinische Arbeiten*, 54 (Berlin, 1985); the origins of the highly contentious 'theme-system' also belong to this period.

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graphically, and we have enough references in other sources to the use of icons in public and private contexts to make it clear that this was a widespread contemporary development.¹⁰ While we tend to think of icons typically as portable images painted on wood, it is important to realize that it was neither the material nor its portability that made a picture into an icon; the Greek word *eikon* in itself simply means 'image'. Nor, for this early period, should we think in terms of the arrangement and use of icons familiar from later Byzantine churches or indeed from Orthodox churches today; whereas in later Byzantine times, a set of protocols developed for their subject-matter and types, together with their position in the church and their liturgical use, this had not yet happened in our period, and some churches, including Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, seem to have had no figural decoration among their furnishings.¹¹ It would, however, appear that in some cases at least portable icons were indeed displayed in churches. We learn, for example, in the seventh-century *Miracles of Artemius*, a collection of miracle stories associated with the Constantinopolitan church of St John the Baptist at Oxeia, of an icon hanging in the left nave of the church, and of the clergy lending an icon to a great lady, who was so devoted to it that she was reluctant to leave the church.¹² But while there seem to have been several icons in this church, they would not yet have been hung on the familiar closed iconostasis, which is also a later development.¹³ Several of the images which attracted the hostility of the Iconoclasts in fact took the form of fixed decoration in churches, in mosaic or fresco; it is rather the subject and treatment of the picture that qualifies it for the term 'icon'—surviving early examples include ivories and textiles as well as wall and ceiling decorations and the portable images painted on wood with which we usually associate the term.¹⁴ This fluidity of Greek terms used for visual art means that where the evidence is literary and the object itself has been lost, as is often the

¹⁰ See, in particular, E. Kitzinger, 'The cult of images in the period before Iconoclasm', *DOP*, 8 (1950), pp. 85–150; K. Weitzmann, *The Icon. Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1978), pp. 7–23. Marlia Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', in Bryer and Herrin, *Iconoclasm*, pp. 59–74, collects examples of iconic and aniconic decoration in contemporary churches.

¹¹ On this question see Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', at p. 70.

¹² *Miracula Artemii* [hereafter *Mir. Art.*] ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia graeca sacra* (St Petersburg, 1909), chs 6, 31. For discussion see V. Déroche, 'L'Authenticité de l'"Apologie contre les Juifs" de Léontios de Néapolis', *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 110 (1986), pp. 655–69, at pp. 658–9.

¹³ See T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1971), pp. 168ff.

¹⁴ See also Weitzmann, *The Icon*.



Plate 1 Ivory showing the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi, Syria or Egypt, sixth century (Medieval and Later Antiquities 1904, 7-2, 1, by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).



Plate 2 Ivory Diptych of Christ between Saints Peter and Paul and the Virgin Enthroned with Angels, sixth century (Berlin, Staatliche Museen).

case, it can often be difficult to know exactly what medium is being referred to.¹⁵

What, then, made a Christian work of art into an icon? By the seventh and eighth centuries the argument over *eikones* was understood to refer to holy images which received special veneration, and particularly to images depicting Christ, the Virgin, or the saints, usually in non-narrative

¹⁵ For the ambiguity see Averil Cameron, Judith Herrin, *et al.*, eds, *Constantinople in the Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden, 1984), pp. 31 (as applied to statues), 48–52 (often mentioning different materials used, but still in the same general vocabulary).

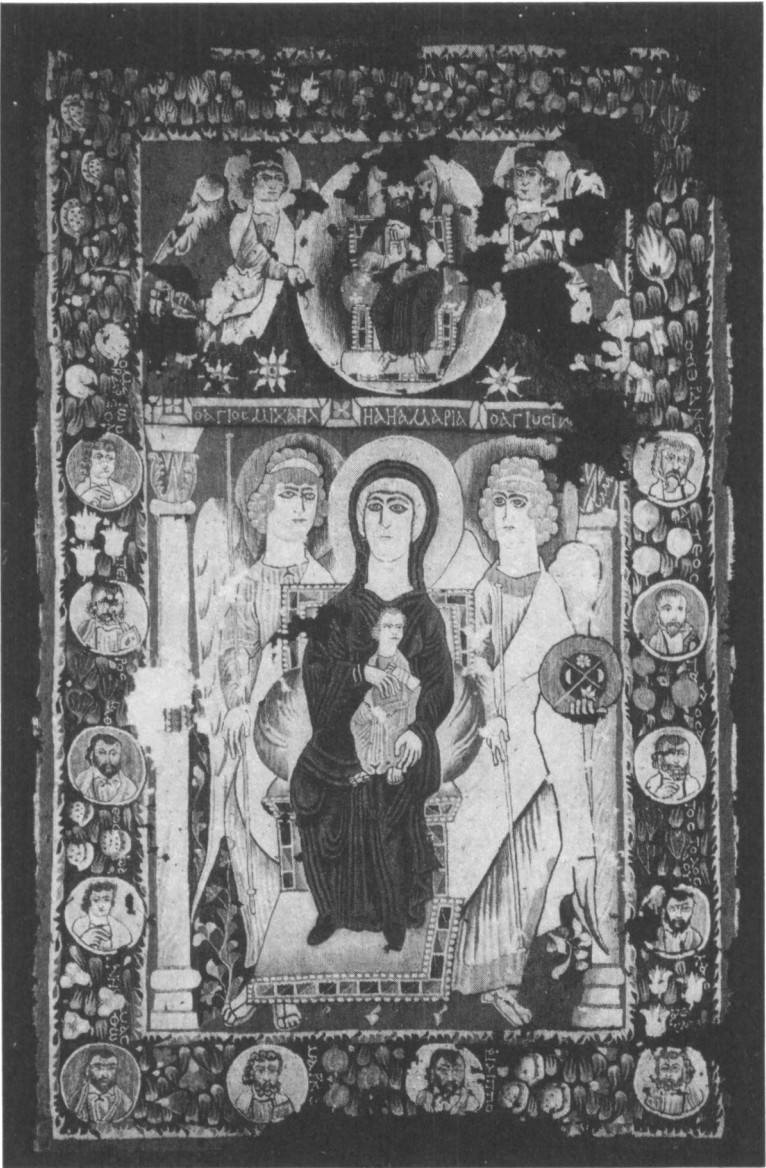


Plate 3 Tapestry Panel of the Virgin Enthroned, wool, sixth century (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr, Fund 67.144).

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representations, that is, in the familiar frontal poses adopted in the great Sinai icons of this period representing the Virgin and Child with arch-angels and saints, Christ, and St Peter (colour plate 1 and plates 4 and 5). Similar images, as we have seen, might also appear in fixed form on the walls of churches, whether in mosaic or fresco; famous surviving examples include the mosaic of the Virgin and Child from Kiti in Cyprus, usually dated to the sixth century (plate 6), the seventh-century mosaics from the church of St Demetrius in Thessaloniki (plate 7), and the frescos in the seventh-century Roman church of S. Maria Antiqua. An encaustic icon of the Virgin also survives from the church of S. Maria in Trastevere, in Rome (plate 8). In addition, there is plentiful evidence for small images owned by private individuals, either fixed in their houses or capable of being carried around.¹⁶ The kind of veneration offered to such images is shown in later illustrations; it consisted of *proskynesis* (bowing, kneeling) and *aspasmos* (kissing the image, as today). These practices, too, become more formalized (though still leaving a good deal to individual habit)¹⁷ only after the final defeat of Iconoclasm. That they were already in use in our period is, however, clear from the fact that they are explicitly discussed by Leontius of Neapolis and others in the seventh century, who defended the practice in terms which were later taken up by John of Damascus and by the Second Council of Nicaea.¹⁸ It is interesting to see that the practice of kissing and bowing down before images is associated in these texts with venerating the Cross, a practice which was also becoming more important in this period, with the acquisition by Justin II of the fragment of the True Cross from Apamea, and still more with the recovery by Heraclius of the True Cross from Jerusalem after its capture by the Persians, and its subsequent transfer to Constantinople.¹⁹ Again, it

¹⁶ Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, AD 312 to 1453* (Englewood Cliffs, 1972), pp. 113ff., 133–41, gives an excellent introduction to the literary evidence.

¹⁷ See Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, 'The Meaning of the Divine Liturgy for the Byzantine Worshipper', in R. Morris, ed., *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham, 1990), p. 13.

¹⁸ Mansi, 13, 284A–B; cf. 377E; see N. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', *HThR*, 45 (1951), pp. 93–106, repr. in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), pp. 226–39, at pp. 232–4. For John of Damascus, veneration of icons, veneration of the Cross, and praying towards the East are main issues. With the increasing awareness of Islam among Christian writers the justification of *proskynesis* becomes even more of an urgent theme.

¹⁹ Justin II: Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, ed. J. B. Chabot, 4 vols (Paris, 1899–1910), 2, p. 285 for Jerusalem, see further below. *Mir. Art.*, ch. 33, refers to the adoration of the Cross as a regular rite, and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross seems to have received a special impetus with its restoration by Heraclius. See, in general, A. Frolov, *La Relique de la vraie croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris, 1961), and see Averil Cameron, 'Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Search for Redefinition', in J. Fontaine and J. Hillgarth, eds, *The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity* (London, forthcoming).

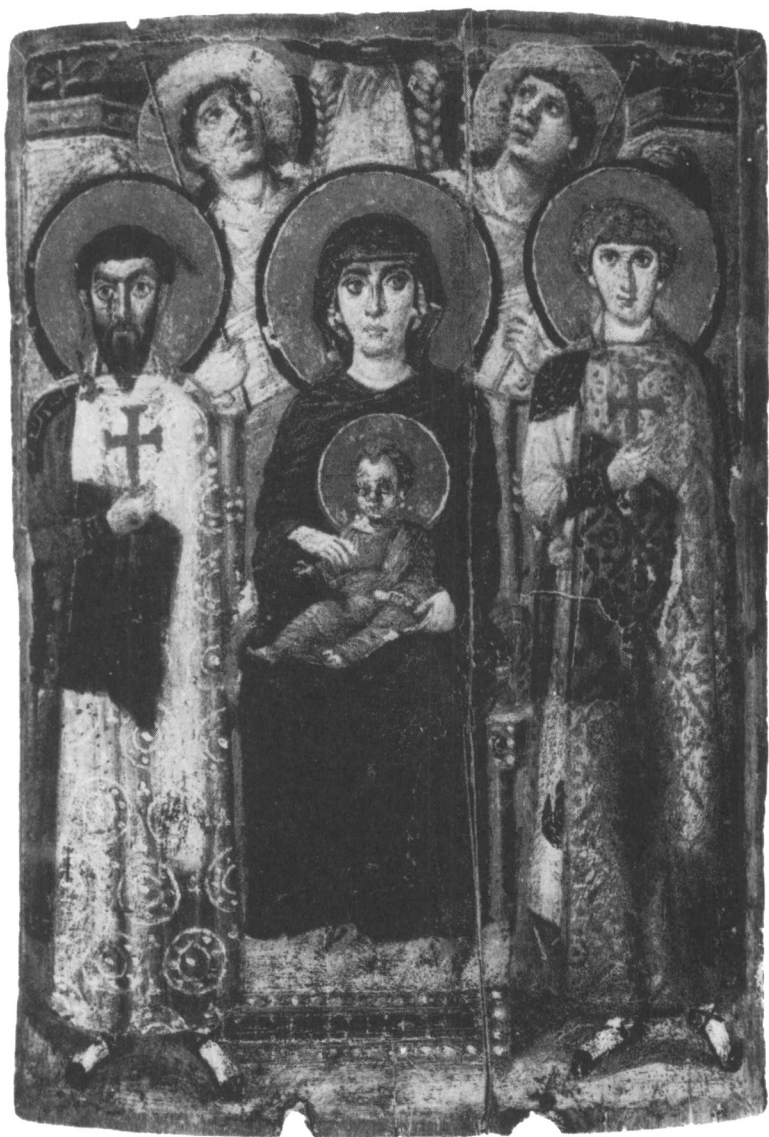


Plate 4 Encaustic Icon of the Virgin Enthroned between St Theodore and St George, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai (by permission of Princeton University Press).

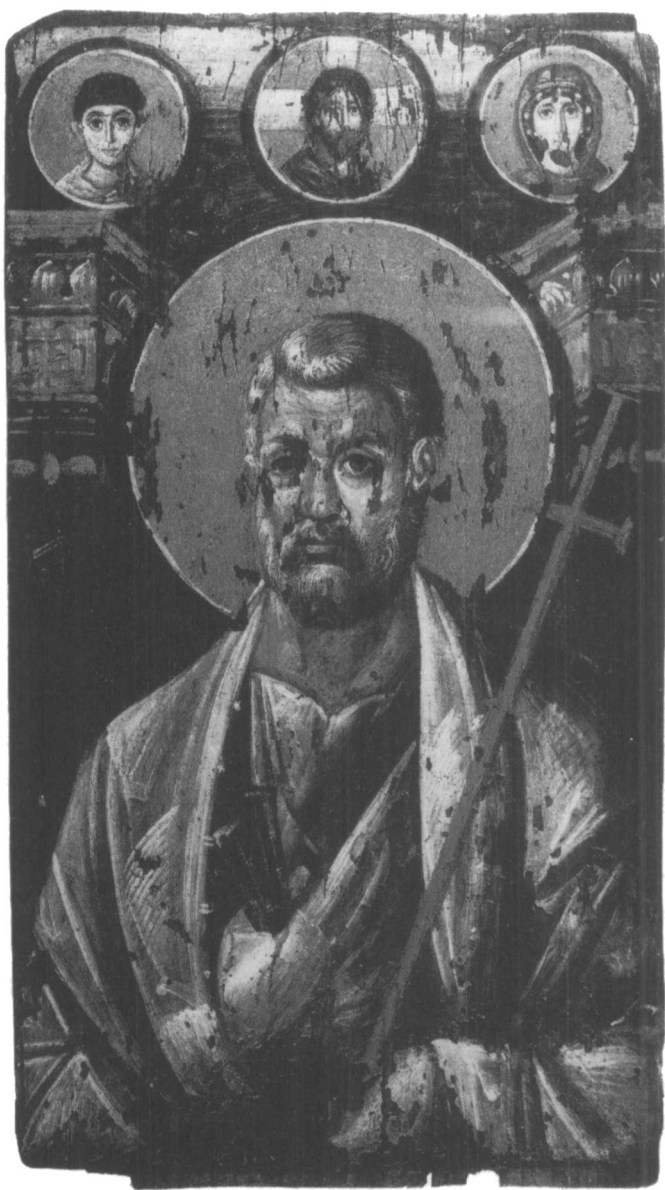


Plate 5 St Peter, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai (by permission of Princeton University Press).

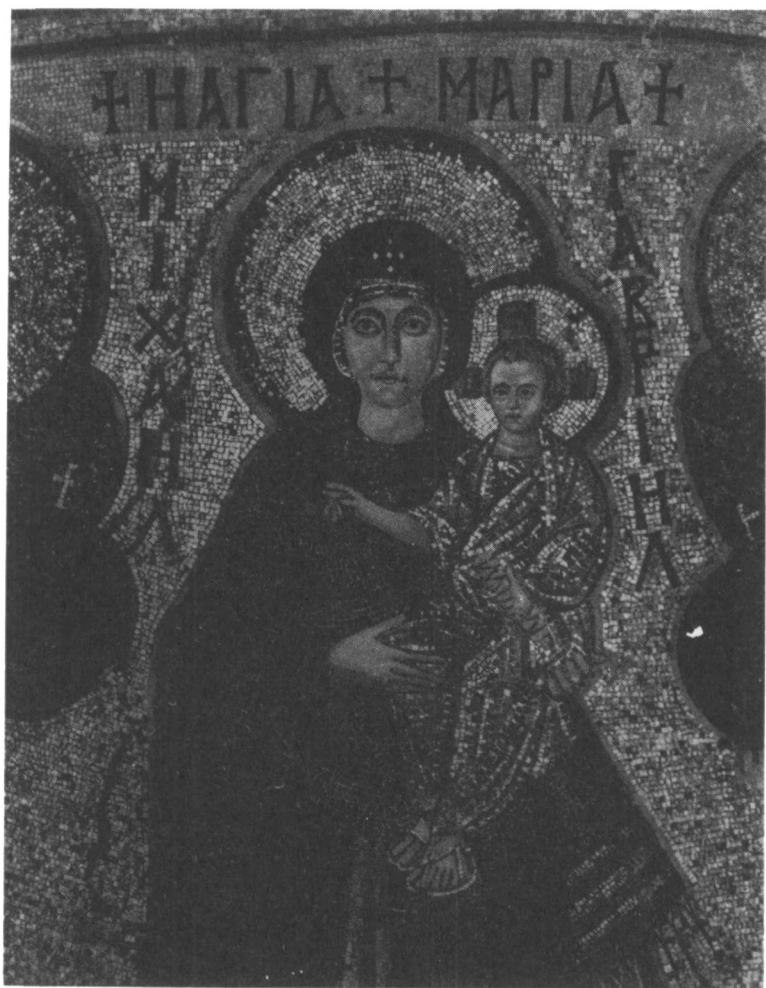


Plate 6 Apse Mosaic, Virgin and Child, Kiti, Cyprus.



Plate 7 Mosaic of St Demetrius between a Bishop and a Dignitary, Church of St Demetrius, Thessaloniki.

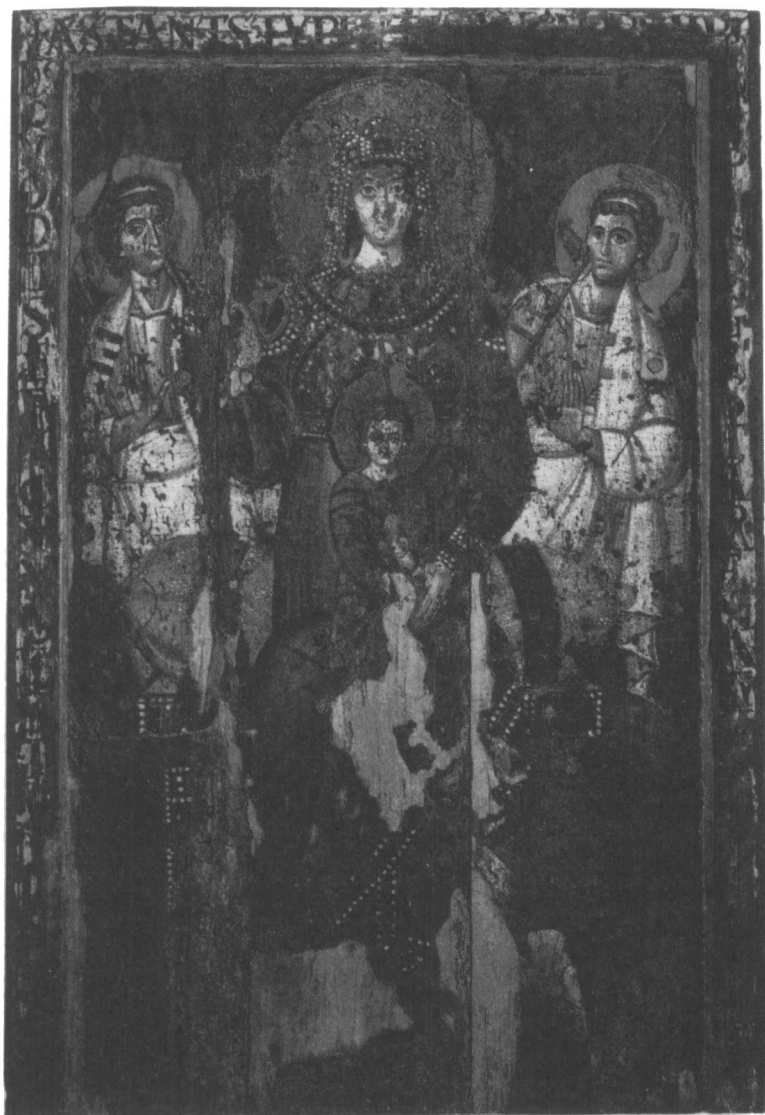


Plate 8 Encaustic Icon of Madonna and Child with Archangels (Rome, Santa Maria in Trastevere).

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is clear that it was not only the liturgy as such that was in the process of evolution during these years, but also the actual practices of individual Christians in churches. Not all the argument over images was on the level of high theory; it was also directed at these and other practical manifestations in Christian piety, especially, as we shall see, the customs to be followed when taking the Eucharist.²⁰ At one level the questioning of images was part of the response to a period of unusual innovation and development in church practice.

If we wish to discover what it was that made these particular images 'holy' in a sense which set them apart, even, perhaps, at this period, from other sorts of religious art, we must, I think, consider both their subject and the sense of divine presence; the images in question were taken to be not 'works of art' in the modern sense, but depictions of objective reality, and, as such, were held to bring the very presence of the divine to the worshipper.²¹ Images 'recalled' the Gospel narrative or the saint who was depicted,²² but they were also regarded as having all the power of the personage represented. Looking at the great Sinai icons, with their intense gaze, it is easy to see how this could be so.

SCHOLASTICISM AND THE SEARCH FOR AUTHORITY

But if icons claimed to represent the truth, it was indeed precisely the issue of knowledge, that is, of access to the truth, that was now in question. The period before Iconoclasm, that of the 'rise of icons', saw a drastic revision of what now counted as 'knowledge', and coincided with some fundamental developments: the evolution of fanciful *patria* in the place of history, the relegation of Constantine the Great to legend and sainthood, the end of the flourishing Neoplatonism of Late Antiquity,²³ the mushrooming of collections of miracle stories testifying to divine

²⁰ See n. 119 below.

²¹ For the former distinction, see H. Belting, *Bild und Kunst. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich, 1990); for the idea of presence, cf. Bishop Kallistos, 'The Meaning of the Divine Liturgy', pp. 8–11, citing the *Life of S. Stephen the Younger*: 'the icon may be termed a door' to the heavenly realm (PG 100, col. 1113A).

²² Mansi 13, 288C.

²³ Whatever actually happened to the Athenian philosophers who left the Academy of Athens in 529, Byzantium in the seventh century no longer had the great philosophical schools of Late Antiquity where Christians and pagans could learn side by side; for a brief and lively description of the latter see P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 91–118, 131–50, and on the Athenian philosophers, especially Simplicius, see I. Hadot, 'The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources', in R. Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London, 1990), pp. 275–303.

intervention, a sharp decrease in the availability of traditional secular learning, with the establishment of the Byzantine chronicle tradition, the avid collection of proof-texts for dogmatic use—handlists of useful arguments and quotations from the Scriptures and the Fathers, and the growth of a literature of question and answer providing a vade-mecum for seventh- and eighth-century Byzantines.²⁴ Attention has been drawn by others to this period as marking an incipient Byzantine scholasticism and the formulation of a conception of authority as resting in a fixed canon of the Fathers.²⁵ The concern for codification intensified in inverse proportion as access to the old knowledge receded, and is vividly illustrated in the lengthy strings of authorities cited by both sides in the proceedings of the Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils. Such a technologizing of religious authority inevitably gave rise to fakes and bogus citations, and laborious measures were taken at the Sixth Council in 680–1 to check authenticity—an interesting reflection on the morality of seventh-century churchmen.²⁶ The concern for textual evidence and the manufacture of authoritative documents is shown in a story told by Anastasius of Sinai of how a Monophysite *praefectus augustalis* of Egypt employed fourteen scribes to make multiple copies of patristic texts, especially the works of Cyril of Alexandria, rewritten in order to make them into Monophysite propaganda.²⁷ The same Anastasius argues elsewhere that material signs are superior to written texts, just because texts are so likely to be falsified.²⁸ It was not easy to get hold even of important texts, and even those who, one might have thought, were well placed to have access to them did not always know the works which are central to our own discussion. Thus Patriarch Germanos in Constantinople did not have access to the *Apology* of Leontius of Neapolis, although it was known to John of

²⁴ See for the *patria* and the question and answer literature respectively, G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* (Paris, 1984) and 'Le Saint, le savant, l'astrologue'. Constantine the Great: see n. 115 below.

²⁵ See Patrick Gray, 'The "Select Fathers": canonizing the patristic past', *Studia Patristica*, 23 (1989), pp. 21–36, and 'Neochalcedonianism and the tradition: from patristic to Byzantine theology', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 8 (1982), pp. 61–70; Averil Cameron, 'Models of the Past in the Late Sixth Century: the Life of the Patriarch Eutychius', in G. Clarke, ed., *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity* (Canberra: 1990), pp. 205–23.

²⁶ See Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Oxford, 1987), p. 278; examples: Mansi, 11, 225B–9A; 332D; 336D; 381–449; see also G. Bardy, 'Faux et fraudes littéraires dans l'antiquité chrétienne', *RHE*, 32 (1936), pp. 290–2, and esp. P. Van den Ven, 'La patristique et l'hagiographie au concile de Nicée en 787', *Byzantion*, 25–7 (1955–7), pp. 325–62.

²⁷ *Hodegos*, X.2.7, ed. K.-H. Uthemann, *Anastasii Opera. Viae Dux*, CChr.SG, 8 (1981); PG 89, cols 184–5.

²⁸ *Hod.*, XII.3, PG 89, col. 198; see the very interesting discussion by A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 40–63.

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Damascus in Jerusalem; it is some measure of the general difficulty of access to books that it was brought to the notice of the Second Council of Nicaea by legates from Rome.²⁹ The Second Council of Nicaea cited the *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian*, but not those of Artemius, and despite the prominence it gave to John of Damascus as a defender of images, did not cite directly from his works. Ironically, we may feel, a new sort of textual criticism evolved in response to this situation, and, in particular, to the attempts to bend the record, which were evidently a serious problem: in order to check authenticity, extraordinary measures were taken to seek out complete texts of works commonly cited only in second-hand extracts, a particularly elaborate procedure of citation, proof-texts, and checking being employed at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, which ended the first phase of Byzantine Iconoclasm. The florilegia of scriptural and patristic citations, which are so prominent a feature of this period, are yet another indicator of this desire to claim authority for approved texts, and thus to guarantee access to genuine knowledge.³⁰ Very naturally in such circumstances, iconophiles, attacked by Iconoclasts as innovators, made particular use of the appeal to tradition and authority, though it is also true that in so doing they were selective about the precise elements in the past history of the Church which were to be accepted.³¹ Indeed, the appeal to unwritten as well as written tradition is a basic argument used in John of Damascus's apologies in defence of images.

Amongst their other properties, then, icons—religious images—functioned as a component in the system of knowledge which evolved as Byzantine society shed its classical past.³² Of course, that is far from being the whole story. But let us see what it might add to the existing explanations for Byzantine Iconoclasm.

²⁹ See Déroche, 'L'Authenticité de l'"Apologie contre les Juifs"', pp. 667–8.

³⁰ See Cyril Mango, 'The Availability of Books in the Byzantine Empire, A.D. 750–850', in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Washington, DC, 1975), pp. 29–46, esp. 30–1.

³¹ N. Baynes, 'Idolatry and the Early Church', in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), pp. 116–43, esp. p. 141; J. McGuckin, 'The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eighth-Century Byzantium', forthcoming. The iconophile argument in Germanos's *De haeresibus et synodis* (PG 98, cols 40–88) and elsewhere rests on the idea that images belong to the tradition of the Ecumenical Councils, whereas Iconoclasm is a flagrant example of heresy. See also Leslie Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century: theory, practice and culture', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 13 (1989), pp. 23–93, at pp. 42–56, emphasizing the role of the florilegia, of which the *Sacra Parallela* attributed to John of Damascus is the most conspicuous example, and which was duly illustrated with approved miniatures: see K. Weitzmann, *The Miniatures in the Sacra Parallela* (Princeton, 1979).

³² See also the stimulating article by G. Dagron, 'Le Culte des images dans le monde byzantin', in his collection *La Romanité chrétienne en Orient* (London, 1984), no. XI.

ICONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

These arguments take various forms, with varying degrees of nuance and plausibility. Aside from the view of Iconoclasm as a purely theological quarrel, some theories focus narrowly on the contemporary context; thus it is often argued that Byzantine Iconoclasm took its impetus from contemporary Islam, sometimes with reference to the Syrian origin of the first iconoclastic emperor, Leo III. It is thus connected straightforwardly with imperial personalities. But it has also received broader explanations, being seen, for instance, as essentially puritanical; a reform movement within the religious life of Byzantium inspired by the sense that the recent problems of the Empire were a punishment from God as well as, perhaps, by a sense of justified criticism from Jews, Muslims, or traditionalist Christians. Alternatively, it has been interpreted as a social movement, or as a matter of the assertion of imperial authority, whether over and against an overly-independent Church, represented particularly by the monks, or, in political terms, after decades of danger and insecurity.³³ Lastly, this was a historical crisis of major proportions, which centred on questions of visual art; naturally, therefore, it has also been seen primarily as a problem in art history.³⁴

In the case of the 'rise of icons', one version of what we might term the social explanation is represented by the persistent claim that devotion to icons represents a type of popular religion.³⁵ Peter Brown has argued to some extent against this view, by emphasizing the appeal of icons to 'human', not 'popular', needs: 'Rather than assume that the worship of icons rose like a damp stain from the masses, we should look into the

³³ See Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, pp. 106–18, for an excellent analysis of the range of explanations listed above. Muslim iconoclasm: see G. R. D. King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 48 (1985), pp. 267–77.

³⁴ Discussion of the coins of Justinian II and their possible relation to contemporary Islamic coinage (Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, pp. 96–106) is part of the story. See also J. Moorhead, 'Byzantine Iconoclasm as a problem in art history', *Parergon*, ns 4 (1986), pp. 1–18. The style and development of icons themselves in the sixth and seventh centuries is still a controversial matter, being hampered by the paucity of surviving material and the lack of external dating criteria; see especially the works of E. Kitzinger, 'On Some Icons of the Seventh Century', in K. Weitzmann *et al.*, eds., *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of A. M. Friend* (Princeton, 1955), pp. 132–50; 'Byzantine art in the period between Justinian and Iconoclasm', *Berichte zum XI. internationalen Byzantinisten Kongress* (Munich, 1958), pp. 1–50; *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), and for some discussion of the issues, J. Trilling, 'Sinai Icons: another look', *Byzantion*, 53 (1983), pp. 300–11. After writing this paper I found many parallels of approach with the valuable discussion of the later phase of Byzantine Iconoclasm by Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century' (see esp. pp. 23–4).

³⁵ See Cyril Mango, *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), p. 98 ('popular piety') and especially Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images'; Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, p. 307.

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needs which the piety of Late Antique men sought to satisfy in looking at them.³⁶ Icons are also held to have a characteristically 'private' role—hence their tendency to be cited in stories about women, who are always seen as the denizens of the private sphere.³⁷ But their appeal was universal: a good deal of contemporary anecdotal evidence suggests that they were seen by high and low alike as offering the power of emotional solace and access to the divine. This might affect emperors and empresses as much as humble people; they too had their favourite icons, and displayed them in public as well as private life. The first major public icons, including the image of Christ 'not made by human hands' from Camuliana, appeared in the context of the wars against Persia in the late sixth century, when they were publicly paraded,³⁸ and in Constantinople, too, public images, like relics, were brought out at times of crisis, especially when the city was attacked; it is in this period that the Virgin, through her icon and relics, acquired her status as the protectress of the city.³⁹ Rich donors were also quick to associate themselves with images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints in the decorative schemes which they financed.⁴⁰ Here, too, public and private merge. Robin Cormack emphasizes the role played by icons in the story of the life of Theodore of Sykeon; in only one of several such interventions, the saints Cosmas and Damian come out of their icon to cure him and to go off to Heaven for help on his behalf.⁴¹ But the icons demonstrate the power of the saint to individuals: in their role as 'supernatural defenders' they also protected the state and society at large.⁴²

It has generally been held that the disturbed social conditions which prevailed in the Byzantine 'Dark Age' fostered the popularity of religious images. In most of its forms such a view is not only functionalist (icons serve a useful purpose in assuaging anxiety), but also essentially reductionist

³⁶ 'A Dark-Age crisis: aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy', *EHR*, 88 (1973), pp. 1–34, repr. in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 251–301, esp. p. 274; earlier, he had written of the 'democratization' of culture in Late Antiquity: see *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), pp. 74–180ff., on which see Averil Cameron, 'Images of authority: elites and icons in late sixth-century Byzantium', *PaP*, 84 (1979), pp. 3–35, esp. 24–5.

³⁷ See Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, pp. 309f. and other works cited there; *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 201–3.

³⁸ Ps. Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, XII.4, tr. in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 114–15.

³⁹ See further Cameron, 'Images of authority'.

⁴⁰ Cf. also the analysis of the *Miracles of S. Demetrios* and the mosaics of the church of St Demetrios at Thessaloniki: Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, pp. 50–94.

⁴¹ *Writing in Gold*, p. 46; analysis of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, pp. 39–47.

⁴² See N. Baynes, 'The supernatural defenders of Constantinople', *AnBoll*, 67 (1949), pp. 165–77 and 'The icons before Iconoclasm', *HThR*, 44 (1951), pp. 116–43 (both in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, pp. 248–60 and 226–39 respectively).



Plate 9 Fresco with Virgin Enthroned between St Felix and St Adaeuctus, with Turtura, in whose honour the fresco was dedicated by her son, sixth century (Rome, Catacomb of Commodilla).

(icons are to be explained in terms other than religious ones). Whatever its merits, it does not do full justice either to the seventh-century developments or to the extraordinary persistence and eventual victory of the iconophiles in the ninth century, which ensured the centrality of icons in the Orthodox Church to this day. Nevertheless, it is possible to avoid these pitfalls while still focusing on the seventh to eighth centuries as a period of major change.

This change affected the very structure of Byzantine society, and thus

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the relationships within it, usually in drastic ways—between town and country, capital and provinces, civil and military. Especially after the death of Heraclius in 641, and the dismal times which followed for the Empire, imperial authority diminished, leaving more and more of a leadership role to the Church and the higher clergy. The latter should not be seen as an isolated sector of society; a substantial number of bishops in this period had also held civil office, and in the siege of Constantinople in 626 nobody found it odd for authority to be vested in the patriarch, nor for the military despatches later sent back from the Emperor Heraclius's campaigns against the Persians to be read out from the ambo in Hagia Sophia, also the scene of political demonstrations.⁴³ The interdependence in these events of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and indeed personnel, is very striking; indeed, the responses to the military danger included actual liturgical innovation.⁴⁴ The early seventh century saw some important developments in the patriarchal liturgy of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which collectively can only have enhanced the position and authority of the patriarch himself.⁴⁵ The triumphal return of the Emperor from his Persian wars, when he was formally met at Hieria by his son and the patriarch Sergius, also combined liturgical features with traditional imperial ceremony.⁴⁶ The Church's position changed in other ways, too. Its wealth, if anything, had been increasing; even small and obscure Syrian churches in the seventh century owned vast amounts of liturgical silver, which continue to present us with surprises in relation to the overall economic picture (plate 10).⁴⁷ The Quinisext Council of 691–2 was

⁴³ *Chronicon Paschale, 284–628 AD*, ed. and tr. Michael and Mary Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), s.a. 626, 628.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, s.a. 624, and cf. also s.a. 615; for all this account see the valuable translation and notes by Michael and Mary Whitby, esp. pp. 166ff., referring to further bibliography; the 626 siege marked an important moment in the formation of the idea of Constantinople as specially protected by God and especially the Virgin, although the famous icon of the Virgin at Blachernae (no longer surviving) is not securely attested at this date (see Averil Cameron, 'The Virgin's robe: an episode in the history of early seventh-century Constantinople', *Byzantion*, 49 (1979), pp. 47–8). The editors comment that the liturgical changes of 615 and 624 were 'intended to emphasise that God was present with the congregation, a reliable source of protection in troubled times' (p. 168, n. 454).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., H.-J. Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy*, Eng. tr. (New York, 1986), pp. 38–40, 164–72.

⁴⁶ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), 1, anno mundi 6119, pp. 327–8; cf. Nicephorus, *Breviarum*, 19, and see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 70–2. On the chronological problems and the question of whether or not these two accounts refer to the same occasion, see Mango, *Patriarch Nikephoros*, pp. 185–6.

⁴⁷ See now Marlia Mundell Mango, 'The Uses of Liturgical Silver, 4th–7th Centuries', in Morris, ed., *Church and People in Byzantium*, pp. 245–62; cf. also M. Kaplan, 'L'Eglise byzantine des VIe–XIe siècles: terres et paysans', in *ibid.*, pp. 109–23; according to Procopius, *De*



Plate 10 Silver Paten from Stuma Treasure, showing the Communion of the Apostles, Syria, late sixth century (Istanbul Archaeological Museum).

justifiably worried about the situation of bishops and clergy whose sees had been taken over by 'barbarians'; but even as these lands were lost, the growth of monastic holdings changed the balance of ecclesiastical to secular property in the territories which remained. While these major

aedificiis, ed. J. Haury, rev. G. Wirth (Leipzig, 1913), I. 1. 65, the original sanctuary furnishings of St Sophia in Constantinople amounted to 40,000 lbs of silver; the altar was of gold, with gold columns and a ciborium of silver (Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis on Hagia Sophia*, ed. P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1912), lines 720–54). The same period saw changes in the monetary and fiscal structure as basic as any of the military and administrative developments: see the contributions by C. Morisson, J. Durliat, and R. Delmaire in *Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantin, IVe–VIIe siècle* (Paris, 1989).

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changes were affecting the place of churches, monasteries, and ecclesiastics in Byzantine society, we see a parallel move towards the interpretation of the liturgy and the churches themselves. In several contemporary works the Church is interpreted as the image or microcosm of heaven, and the liturgy itself as a symbolic enactment which also implied the real presence of God. Church furniture, vestments, icons were all parts that made up the whole, as a series of writers pointed out.⁴⁸

Why did images become so much more of an issue in the East than in the West? While not neglecting the inheritance of debate about Christian art, we must also place the rise of icons in its contemporary context. We have already noted the extent of general social change in the East in the seventh century, and the fact that icons also came to prominence simultaneously with an increasing splendour in the celebration of the liturgy, accompanied by a theoretical exposition in symbolic terms, and a focusing of attention on the meaning of the Eucharist and on all aspects of church decoration, furniture, and ceremony. We shall see that the opponents of icons were concerned not only with the Platonizing concepts of image and prototype, but also with questions of materiality and symbolism which arose in several other seventh-century contexts. Already in the sixth century the patriarch Eutychius had argued against a symbolic interpretation of the Eucharist,⁴⁹ and we shall see during the seventh century a shift away from the more symbolic interpretation of Maximus Confessor in the direction of literal realism, associated with Patriarch Germanos I (715–30). Thus the debate in which religious images were a part was both more immediate and more continuous in the Eastern context, where the history of Christian opposition to images combined with the particular circumstances of the seventh century to make them the focus of existing tensions between symbolism and realism.

⁴⁸ See Bishop Kallistos, 'The Meaning of the Divine Liturgy', and further below. Symbolic interpretations of church buildings: Corippus, *In laudem Iustini*, IV. 288–311, ed. with tr. and comm. Averil Cameron (London, 1976), with pp. 206–7; Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis on H. Sophia*, on which see R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, 'The architecture of Ekphrasis: construction and context of Paul the Silentiary's Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 12 (1988), pp. 47–82; Andrew Palmer, with Lyn Rodley, 'The inauguration anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: a new edition and translation with historical and architectural notes and a comparison with a contemporary Constantinopolitan kontakion', *ibid.*, pp. 117–67; Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, and on the symbolism of church architecture in the ninth century and later, cf. also 'The Transformation Symbolism in Byzantine Architecture and the Meaning of the Pantokrator in the Dome', in Morris, ed., *Church and People in Byzantium*, pp. 191–214.

⁴⁹ Eutychius, *Sermo de paschate et eucharistia*, PG 86, 2.2400–1.

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION

But the immediate circumstances of the late seventh and early eighth centuries do not provide the whole explanation for the concerns voiced about religious images, for besides the traditional prohibition of figural art, the question of religious images also relates to longstanding problems which Christians had had with the verbal representation of religious truth.⁵⁰ The Iconoclasts claimed that only the human, not the divine, nature of God could be represented in visual terms.⁵¹ A very similar difficulty had been felt in relation to language by Christian writers for centuries, especially by the Cappadocians; indeed, the representation of God in linguistic terms is still an issue today. One author who followed in the tradition of negative theology set by the Cappadocians was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and, sure enough, during the period of the 'rise of icons' the Pseudo-Dionysius's works gained increasing importance. Several sets of scholia on his works were put together in the sixth and seventh centuries, culminating with the work of John Damascene in the eighth. In contrast to theologians, many historians have tended to neglect such works as peripheral to their concerns, yet the fact that the Pseudo-Dionysius, who posed in the sharpest possible way the central problem of Christian representation, and did so exactly as the rival secular culture was on the verge of yielding, rapidly became canonical for all parties is in itself surely significant.

In a famous passage Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite writes of the ultimate darkness of religious experience. Taking up themes from Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and from Gregory of Nazianzus, he describes how, when Moses knows God, he plunges into the 'truly mysterious darkness of unknowing'.⁵² His briefest work, the *Mystical Theology*, begins with a prayer to the Trinity:

Lead us up beyond unknowing and light,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystic scripture,

⁵⁰ For discussion of earlier patristic views see Charles Murray, 'Art in the Early Church', *JThS*, ns 28 (1977), pp. 303-45; 'Le Problème d'iconophobie et les premiers siècles chrétiens', in F. Boespflug and N. Lossky, eds, *Nicée II 787-1987* (Paris, 1987), pp. 39-49.

⁵¹ See P. Henry, 'What was the Iconoclastic Controversy all about?' *Church History*, 45 (1976), pp. 21-5.

⁵² *Mystical Theology*, 1001A, tr. C. Luibheid and P. Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius: the Complete Works* (London, 1987), p. 137; cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, tr. Members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (Cambridge, 1957), p. 35.

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where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.

This is the culmination of negative theology—one cannot describe but only experience in direct contemplation. The logical outcome should have been silence, an end to theology and to all attempts to describe the truth.

In practice, of course, churchmen continued to try to describe the divine. The Pseudo-Dionysius himself discusses the implications of the view that God can only be assessed through images. While he presents this as a linguistic dilemma, he also discusses the imagery commonly used of God in more visual terms. In letter 9, for instance, he describes how in the lost *Symbolic Theology* he had discussed the physical imagery used of God in the Old Testament, including the cruder forms of anthropomorphism; these are to be found, he argues, 'so that what is hidden may be brought out into the open and multiplied, what is unique and undivided may be divided up and multiple shapes and forms be given to what has no shape or form.'⁵³ Similarly, the ranks of angels are represented as creatures on thrones, not 'for the sake of art', but 'as a concession to the nature of our own mind';⁵⁴ for the real simplicity of the heavenly creatures cannot be depicted at all. The author is not concerned with religious images in the sense of icons, but rather with the much more basic question of how God can be apprehended in the first place. These images do not operate through likeness but because they are dissimilar, and this is, in the mind of the Pseudo-Dionysius, the superior form of representation since it does not pretend to portray what is actually transcendent and indescribable.⁵⁵

But the author is indeed in a dilemma. He takes up the Pauline saying at Romans 1.20, according to which the invisible truth is to be understood through the visible world;⁵⁶ 'the visible is truly the plain image of the invisible',⁵⁷ even while, again like Paul, he emphasizes the mysteriousness of God, which cannot be expressed directly but only through signs, as in the case of the parables of Jesus.⁵⁸ The Pseudo-Dionysius was not writing about the religious images that we call icons, that is, direct representations

⁵³ Letter 9, 1105C, pp. 282–3.

⁵⁴ *Celestial Hierarchies*, 2, 137B, p. 148.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 140D, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Letter 9, 2, 1108B, p. 284.

⁵⁷ Letter 10, 1117B, p. 289.

⁵⁸ Letter 9, 1105D, p. 283.

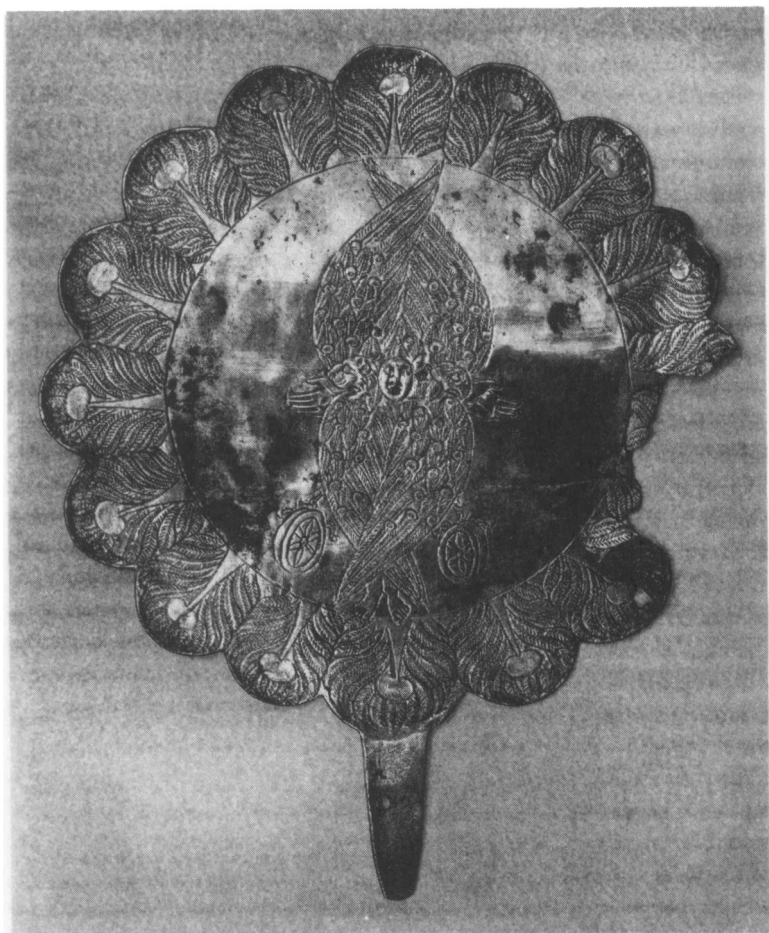


Plate 11 Silver-gilt Rhipidion (liturgical fan) from Riha, Syria, late sixth century, with cherub flanked by fiery wheels, as in the Vision of Ezekiel (cf. Ezekiel 1. 5–14) (Byzantine Visual Resources, © 1991, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC).

of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints, but about the figural depictions of God and the cherubim to be found in the Old Testament. But the cherubim of Solomon and Ezekiel, like the brazen serpent of Moses, were to feature in the catalogues of Old Testament representations to which iconophiles turned for supporting evidence.⁵⁹ Indeed, his preoccupation with the general issue of representation of the divine made him a natural source for the iconophile writers, who selected the parts of his argument most congenial to their needs. As has been noted, Hypatius of Ephesus in the sixth century had already justified Christian art along the lines of interpretation laid down by the Pseudo-Dionysius.⁶⁰ But the Pseudo-Dionysius is not to be seen as wholly symbolist;⁶¹ a more realist reading is also possible, which lays emphasis on the liturgy and the sacraments, and this approach was indeed taken up in the course of the greater emphasis on literalism in the late seventh century. Accordingly, the Iconoclasts were also able to claim his support at the Iconoclast Council of Hieria in 754, as the acts of the Seventh Council make clear: 'Since they put as a preface the patristic words of Dionysius the revealer of God, would that they had preserved his teachings, as well as those of all our holy Fathers, unbroken.'⁶² But he was particularly cited by iconophiles: the account of the decoration of Hosios David at Thessaloniki, for instance, refers directly to the Pseudo-Dionysius's discussion of cherubim.⁶³ Iconophiles were able to find in the corpus a justification both for the double concept of the Eucharist as image and as the Real Presence, and were thus able to deny that the Eucharist was 'only an image'.⁶⁴ In one sense, the thrust of the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius led to the path of contemplation, mystical silence, and this was

⁵⁹ E.g. Joh. Dam., *Oratio* III.22, *De imaginibus*; Theodore Abu Qurrah, *De cultu imaginum*, ed. I. Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra, Traité du culte des icônes* (Jounieh and Rome, 1986, ch. 15); see Sidney H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian practice of venerating images', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (1985), pp. 53–73. I am grateful to Sidney Griffith for his generosity in sharing his translation with me in advance of publication, and for continued help in other ways.

⁶⁰ Kitzinger, 'Cult of images', pp. 137f., with Charles Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy. Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 288–308, at p. 298, and Baynes, 'The icons before Iconoclasm', p. 226–8.

⁶¹ As, for instance, J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington, 1969), p. 79; see, however, P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis = Studies and Texts*, 71 (Toronto, 1984); A. Louth, 'Pagan theurgy and Christian sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite', *JThS*, ns 37 (1986), pp. 432–8, and see his *Denys the Areopagite* (London, 1989).

⁶² Mansi, 13, 212A, tr. D. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), p. 54.

⁶³ Ignatius Monachus, *Narratio de imagine Christi in monasterio Latoni*, 6, tr. in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 155.

⁶⁴ See Bishop Kallistos, 'The Meaning of the Divine Liturgy', p. 17.

certainly a strong element in the theology of Maximus;⁶⁵ signs and symbols pointed the seeker of truth on his way, not logical argument.

Thus knowledge of God, if it cannot be adequately expressed in language, must come through signs. Pseudo-Dionysius was voicing an emphasis on the hiddenness of divine truth and the need for revelation through signs which had been present in Christian discourse from the earliest times. In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* he understands the liturgy in this way. The language is difficult; the synaxis itself is said to be surrounded by 'symbolic garments of enigmas', yet the Sacrament can nevertheless show itself clearly and 'fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and ineffable light'.⁶⁶ As the Pseudo-Dionysius insists, it is St Paul's emphasis on mystery and paradox that lies behind this thinking. Paul too lays heavy stress on the hiddenness of divine truth, how God's 'foolishness has confounded the wisdom of the world' by the paradox of the Cross and how now 'we see through a glass, darkly'.⁶⁷ Augustine, in his turn, had struggled to define the source and nature of divine knowledge, citing the same Pauline arguments in doing so;⁶⁸ he too arrived at the view that knowledge of God came through revelation, and spoke of the Scriptures as the 'fleshly wrappings' of the truth.⁶⁹ Following Paul, Christian discourse itself was essentially figural, and our consciousness of the long-standing conflict over biblical interpretation between Alexandrian allegorizers and Antiochene literalists should not be allowed to obscure the fact that all Christian writers alike, from Paul onwards, used a vocabulary of mystery and hidden meaning.

After all, Christian discourse appealed to faith: 'He that hath ears, let him hear', and 'It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'.⁷⁰ Fundamental to it was the idea of a complex of signs and symbols requiring interpretation but capable of revealing the truth; despite the Old Testament prohibition on graven images, it was only a very short step from this figural discourse to the resort to actual visual images.⁷¹ When Anastasius of Sinai preferred pictorial representations to

⁶⁵ Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, 2 vols, Theophaneia, 34-35 (Bonn, 1986), esp. 2, pp. 221-41; Maximus: see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenners*, 2nd edn (Einsiedeln, 1961).

⁶⁶ *Ecc. Hier.* 2, 428C, p. 212.

⁶⁷ I Cor. 1. 18f.; 13. 12.

⁶⁸ *De doctrina christiana*, I.11.11, 12.11; see Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 66-7.

⁶⁹ Cf. *De rudibus catechizandis*, 9.13.

⁷⁰ Mark 4. 9; Matt. 13. 43; Luke 14. 15; Matt. 13. 11.

⁷¹ See on this Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, ch. 2, esp. pp. 47-8, 56-7. For revelation by 'signs' and the view of creation as containing 'signs' of God's purpose in the Early Christian period see R. M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London, 1957).

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written ones, he was only voicing a version of the arguments by which earlier Christian writers had justified and praised religious pictures as a means of instruction.⁷² His argument is the converse of the Iconoclast privileging of writing over pictures; by contrast, images and writing were often at this stage simply equated by iconophiles, for whom it was necessary to show that images had the same status as the Scriptures.⁷³ In the words of John of Damascus, the way was clear: depiction of God in human form was not merely allowable but even incumbent. 'How depict the invisible? How picture the inconceivable?' In his view pictures could help: 'When he who is without form or limitation . . . takes upon himself the form of a servant in substance and a body of flesh, then you may draw his likeness and show it to anyone willing to contemplate it.'⁷⁴

REVELATION THROUGH SIGNS

At this point, however, a shift takes place. Images were not the only indicators of divine truth. Moreover, while symbolism was indeed an issue in this period, it is misleading to talk of symbols in relation to the signs which are the ways of revelation; rather, the signs which are often listed in seventh- and eighth-century authors as ways to an understanding of God are not symbols in the usual sense in which we use the term—when one thing stands for another—but, to quote Lossky, real 'material signs of the presence of the spiritual world'.⁷⁵

These 'signs' by which God reveals himself are variously listed, but typically include the Cross, the Scriptures, the trappings of the liturgy—incense, candles, water, as well as, for instance, the Ark and the Burning Bush. The listing of signs had also begun early;⁷⁶ from now on, however, they begin to acquire the status of canonical lists, and holy images to figure as one of the items included.⁷⁷ Iconophile writers claim for images the same status as the Cross and the Gospels, deserving of veneration,

⁷² See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 150.

⁷³ See Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', pp. 70–5 for examples. In later versions of the iconophile argument the point is made that pictures are universal, whereas writing is circumscribed by having to use a specific language.

⁷⁴ *Oratio I de imaginibus*, 16, ed. B. Kotter, 3 (Berlin, 1975), pp. 89–90; PG 94, col. 1245.

⁷⁵ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 189; this judgement draws on contemporary statements, but cf. also D. Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Eng. tr. (Cambridge, 1975), p. 85: 'symbols are not signs'.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies*, 10.19.

⁷⁷ E.g. John Dam., *Oratio III de imaginibus* 22, Kotter, 3, p. 129, cf. *Or.* I.12 (the Burning Bush, the dew upon the fleece (Judges 6. 40), Aaron's Rod, manna, the brazen serpent (Num. 21.9), the sea, water, and clouds).

though not of worship; as icons are a 'sign', so the other 'signs' could be read as icons.⁷⁸ Again, the case of the Cross is instructive: the terms applied to it in the Christian apologiae against the Jews in order to rebut charges of idolatry, include both *typos* and *semeion* (sign);⁷⁹ during 'second Iconoclasm' debates about terminology reached a highly sophisticated level in the works of Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite, but in the early stages of the controversy the very ambiguity of the Greek terminology may have helped the equation.

The listings of signs indicates an authoritarian view of divine knowledge, based on revelation; it works on the premise that knowledge is not to be found through secular learning but by direct revelation. But this revelation is not arbitrary; on the contrary, it comes only through the channels which have been officially approved as orthodox by the Church. Thus the arguments about the nature of images, as about material and created signs in general, were indeed arguments about authority, about the licensing of signs. In our period, the learning of the world really does fall away, and as it does, holy images begin to claim the authoritative status of divine 'signs'. The argument on their behalf made large claims: Theodore Abu Qurrah's ninth-century defence of images argues that as Christianity is based on a mystery, to reject icon-veneration is to reject all the other mysteries of Christianity as well. He, too, invokes St Paul, this time for an answer to the accusation that icon-veneration is foolish: had not the Apostle said that Christianity itself was based on foolishness in the eyes of the world—'We speak of God's wisdom in a mystery' and 'The world's wisdom is foolishness with God'?⁸⁰ Religious images were a way out of this dilemma; they fell naturally into place as one of the signs by which the impossibility of understanding God through language could be circumvented.⁸¹ But the repertoire of these images was potentially vast, and their doctrinal and other implications could be alarming if uncontrolled. What we see therefore are progressive attempts by iconophiles and Iconoclasts alike to do just that, that is, to regulate the signs and define their meaning.

Miracle afforded another means by which to read the providence of God. As icons are not simply indicators of popular religion, so miracle can be read not just as a manifestation of popular credulity, but as providing

⁷⁸ The same idea transferred into Arabic: Abu Qurrah, *De cultu imaginum*, 15: 'the greatest, the most famous icon, the tablets of the Law'.

⁷⁹ See Déroche, 'L'Authenticité de l'"Apologie contre les Juifs"', p. 661; see further below.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 2. 7; 3. 19, cited by Abu Qurrah, *De cultu imaginum*, 3.

⁸¹ Cf. Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', pp. 75–81.

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direct access to knowledge of God, and as a further alternative to secular learning. The period of the so-called 'rise of icons' also saw a proliferation of miracle collections attached to shrines and a great increase in stories of miraculous intervention, often featuring the Virgin or with reference to icons.⁸² Like our reading of the significance of icons, how we view the collections of such stories in the *Miracles of Artemius* or the *Miracles of S. Demetrius* (to name only two) is partly a matter of emphasis. While they do certainly testify in our terms to popular credulity, we are equally entitled to see them as yet another example of the impulse towards an authoritative codification of the signs which could lead to religious knowledge.

The Virgin, the Mother of God, is the agent in many of the miracle stories, typically as a beautiful lady dressed in purple or blue, and is frequently mentioned in iconophile argument. Of the surviving pre-Iconoclastic images, a high proportion depict the Virgin and Child, a fact which is indicative of her Christological importance, and which, in itself, illustrates the way in which visual art was being used to make doctrinal points. The period of the rise of icons also saw the establishment of the cult of the Virgin as the special protectress of Constantinople; the 'restoration of orthodoxy' took place in 843, but it was with the dedication by Photius in 867 of an image of the Virgin and Child in the apse of St Sophia that the ending of Iconoclasm was finally confirmed. In the West, from the sixth century onwards, we can see the beginning of the collections of 'Mary miracles' which continue into the medieval period.⁸³ But while there was nothing quite like this in the East, it was, indeed, precisely now that the icons of the Virgin leapt to prominence in the sieges of 626 and 717; indeed, the great Akathistos hymn was elaborated as a hymn of triumph to the Virgin after the city's deliverance in 626. Now, too, I believe, the Marian relics in Constantinople, the Virgin's robe and girdle, were equipped with their highly elaborated stories.⁸⁴

The Cross, the Mother of God, miracles, the holy images—these must be taken together. I find it hard to separate consideration of icons either from consideration of the other 'signs' or from verbal representation. All were seen as ways of perceiving truth, and truth was seen as absolute and

⁸² See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 208–13. For some examples, see Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 133–9.

⁸³ See Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind. Theory, Record and Event 1000–1215* (London, 1987), pp. 132ff.; Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 212ff. (also associated with miracle stories focused on the Eucharist).

⁸⁴ Cameron, 'Images of authority', pp. 18–24.

objectively real. But such a conception of knowledge was, of course, also political. Again we turn to the Pseudo-Dionysius. Besides his emphasis on mystery and the need for revelation, his most striking characteristic is his insistence on hierarchy, as shown by the titles of his works known as the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*. Being is constituted for him in an ascending hierarchy, from the natural world at the bottom to the divine truth at the summit; heaven and the Church are each similarly constructed. From this it follows that knowledge will be a matter of gradual ascent towards the ultimate. There is no need to labour the Platonic framework within which he writes, except to stress that like Plato he, too, was an advocate of the closed society. For the Pseudo-Dionysius, too, there is no logical way of dissent; it is knowledge, not opinion, about which he writes, *episteme* rather than *doxa*, and knowledge, like Plato's *episteme*, is only of truth. The codification of hierarchies, the marshalling of instances of divine intervention, the listing of patristic and scriptural citations were all striving for this certainty, for which the Pseudo-Dionysius taught that the soul longed with a natural desire (*eros*). It is no coincidence that both the great followers of the Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus Confessor and John Damascene, each sought effectively to produce great syntheses of Christian knowledge, as though a complete listing of the routes to religious understanding would guarantee the eventual perception of truth.⁸⁵

In such an intellectual climate the various components of the system locked together to form an overall coherence. I am suggesting that we should see icons as part of this complex. The importance of icons is not just a problem in Byzantine art, though, of course, it may be that too. Nor are they to be seen just in social terms, whether in relation to patronage or to private piety. Rather, they provided one of the answers to the problem of how God could be apprehended, a problem which had been inherent in Christianity from the very beginning and which only became more acute as time went on. They were the guarantors of truth;⁸⁶ while at the same time a way of controlling true belief. And as the classical alternative fell away, Christian knowledge *was* social knowledge.

⁸⁵ Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 218–19. In John Damascene the defence of images went together with the exposition of the faith (cf. his *De fide orthodoxa*, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 2 (Berlin, 1973). For John of Damascus and the idea of a hierarchy of images and approved ways to God, see also John Elsner, 'Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium', *Art History*, 11 (1988), pp. 471–91, esp. pp. 477–91.

⁸⁶ Thus the iconophiles condemned iconophile 'innovation' and claimed their own obedience to apostolic, patristic, and ecclesiastical tradition: Mansi, 13, 208C, tr. Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, p. 52; see Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', pp. 48–9.

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This is not the old question of the theology of the icon, but an attempt to place the rise of icons in the context of a general intellectual realignment, in effect, the replacement of the remaining vestiges of classical culture by a codification of knowledge based on religious truth. It has the advantage for the historian that explanations for the rise of icons are neither detached from the general cultural context, as they often are, or too closely linked to particular external circumstances. For while if one could get away from functional explanations altogether, history would probably not be history, historical explanations are much more satisfying if they can embed the phenomena they are trying to explain in a really thick context.

REALISM AND TRUTH

Seeing icons in this way raises some other questions. One is that of realism; for if icons are to be seen not just as a specialized form of Byzantine art, but as having a connection with the sociology of knowledge, the old art-historical problem of realism as opposed to abstractionism has to be reopened. However, the reason why this should be a problem lies more with ourselves and with the way in which we frame the question than with the icons. Contemporaries did not doubt that they were true representations of actual reality, a conviction which explains the accusations of idolatry from Iconoclasts and Muslims alike. To us, Byzantine religious art usually appears anything but realistic.⁸⁷ Nor, on the whole, do modern historians share the contemporary beliefs either in the religious entities themselves (or at any rate, not in these objectified forms) or in the notion that language, verbal or artistic, represents objective reality. But the question of realism remains. Photius on the restored image of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia and the French realist painters of the nineteenth century alike claimed that art was a reflection of reality. Both had supreme confidence; neither would have tolerated for a moment the modern difficulty that 'realism' is itself relative.

But during the centuries before Iconoclasm—the period of the rise of icons—the conception of reality itself had changed. Confusingly for us, Erich Auerbach's famous book, *Mimesis*, made 'realism' the touchstone of Christian and medieval, as opposed to classical, representation. His classic

⁸⁷ On these issues see L. Brubaker, 'Perception and conception: art, theory and culture in ninth-century Byzantium', *Word and Image*, 5 (1989), forthcoming, with 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', pp. 24–6.

analyses of the Gospel account of Peter's denial of Christ and of the arrest of Peter Valvomeres in the history of Ammianus Marcellinus put forward an antithesis between the formalities of classical representation, with its emphasis on levels of style, and the contrasting realism of Christian and medieval description.⁸⁸ Christianity provided the touchstone: to quote from his epilogue, 'It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles.'⁸⁹ Christianity and Christianization are therefore made the keys to understanding changing types of representation in Late Antiquity generally. But this is the realism of Huizinga's late Western Middle Ages, with its earthy juxtaposition of opposites, and disregard for the unity of styles. It is not at all the same as the realism of Byzantine icons; indeed, the East, with its continuous theological tradition, went in quite another way. Auerbach's antithesis is embedded in the context of interpretation in which Late Antiquity is seen as demonstrating encroaching gloom, the descent into irrationality, 'something sultry and oppressive', a 'darkening of the atmosphere of life'—all the familiar spectres of old-fashioned history, and categories which, if they belong anywhere, belong to the fragmentation of the early medieval West rather than to Byzantium.

In contrast, the realism claimed for religious images by contemporaries in early Byzantium has to do with authority. The ultimate reality, God himself, cannot be represented directly, either in visual art or in language, and can only be known by entering the 'cloud of unknowing' described by the Pseudo-Dionysius. But the images of Christ in human form, and of the Virgin and the saints, function as guarantees, ways to perceiving truth.

Obviously the Christianization of society was indeed vital to the rise in importance of religious images, though not in Auerbach's sense, and although this process was slow, the sixth century can plausibly be seen as the critical stage in the East. From now on, social and economic circumstances also increasingly undermined the classical culture which had survived tenaciously for so long. What effect it continued to exert on Byzantium in later centuries is another story. Meanwhile, religious images represented one element in the necessary construction of an alternative world-view.

⁸⁸ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Eng. tr. (Princeton, 1953), pp. 40ff., 53f., 63, 74ff.; cf. *The Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Eng. tr. (London, 1965), pp. 22, 60f.

⁸⁹ *Mimesis*, p. 555.

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MATERIALITY, CREATED OBJECTS AND LITERALISM

Yet some powerful counter-arguments existed, which we can clearly see in prototype during the seventh century. One of the charges made most often by the eighth-century Iconoclasts was that of idolatry: veneration of an image was simply veneration of a material object, and therefore constituted idolatry.⁹⁰ If indeed icons were considered as a 'real material sign' the charge was fully understandable. It was not, however, an argument brought against icons alone, but against the veneration of all created objects, and indeed the status of matter. It was, most notably, at the heart of Christian-Jewish argument, and it is very striking to note the degree to which an intensified Christian polemic against Jews is already apparent, in which the same argument was directed at Christian veneration of the Cross, well before images as such came under attack. Anti-Jewish arguments creep into a strikingly high proportion of the surviving theological writings of the period, not to mention the anti-Jewish polemic we hear of but which does not survive.⁹¹ In the seventh-century context, the argument appears particularly in connection with Palestine, and especially with Jerusalem, after its capture by the Persians in 614 and surrender to the Arabs in 638.⁹² The Jews were accused of assisting the Persians in their invasion, and after his triumphal return to Constantinople and the restoration of the True Cross (seized by the Persians in 614), the Emperor Heraclius (610–41) decreed forced baptism for Jews, a measure repeated according to Theophanes by Leo III in 721–2 on the eve of Iconoclasm.⁹³ In the several anti-Jewish polemical works which survive from the immediately following period, from the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, a

⁹⁰ See the letter of Germanos I to Thomas of Klaudiopolis, PG 98, cols 156C–D, 176D, on which see Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, pp. 331–2; Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', p. 34; see also Dagron, 'Le Culte des images', pp. 141–2.

⁹¹ Rebuttal of supposed Jewish arguments is still a strong theme in Abu Qurrah's tract, which goes through the whole repertoire of created objects which receive veneration in the Old Testament; see Griffith, 'Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic Tract', pp. 59–62; also Sidney H. Griffith, 'Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos* and the Muslims', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32 (1987), pp. 341–58, at pp. 345ff. For the importance of the theme in the seventh century see also Dagron, 'Le culte des images', p. 143 ('cette nouvelle appréciation de l'héritage judaïque'). The hardening of Christian attitudes to Judaism is not so much a cause of Iconoclasm as a parallel development.

⁹² See recently G. G. Stroumsa, 'Religious contacts in Byzantine Palestine', *Numen*, 36 (1989), pp. 16–42.

⁹³ See, e.g., A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London, 1971), pp. 48–57. Leo III: Theoph., *Chron.*, anno mundi 6214, p. 401, de Boor; according to Theophanes the iconoclastic edict of Caliph Yazid II which belongs to 722 was also inspired by 'a Jewish wizard'.

kind of Christian catechism for Jewish converts in the form of a dialogue, to the *Apology* of Leontius of Neapolis and the so-called *Trophies of Damascus*, the Christian worship of material objects, in particular the Cross, is represented as a major Jewish accusation to be rebutted.⁹⁴ It is answered by two strategies—resort to lists of citations from the Old Testament, indicating the material objects honoured by Jews themselves (the tablets of the law, the Ark, the Burning Bush, and so on), and the argument, also on the basis of Scripture, that the Cross is venerated for what it represents, not as a piece of wood.⁹⁵ The dramatic reversals in the fate of Jerusalem, and especially the vicissitudes of the True Cross in this period, made such a focus particularly apt, and also helped to stimulate an increased interest in Constantine the Great as the traditional discoverer of the True Cross and builder of Christian Jerusalem.⁹⁶ Both Christians and Jews had had brief periods of renewed hope in relation to Jerusalem, and both were disappointed. Doing their best to save the situation, the Christian anti-Jewish dialogues make much of the fact that the Temple had never been rebuilt, while the Christian Empire could still just about be said to have survived.⁹⁷

The Christian apologiae for veneration of the Cross thus had a strongly political flavour. But they also fit into the wider context of Christian concern about materiality; when the examples chosen in the anti-Jewish literature broaden to include icons they do so in relation to their physical nature as images on wood or other materials. Were not Christians idolaters and worshippers of the material? The counter-argument followed the teaching of the Pseudo-Dionysius that the visible world signifies God; thus we read in Leontius of Neapolis how God is worshipped through creation and created objects, which embrace not only 'heaven and earth and sea', but also 'wood and stone . . . relics and church-buildings and the cross'.⁹⁸ Creation itself, it is argued, is a sign and mirror of God; the material objects which he has created are the signs through which he is recognized and represented. A similar defence of

⁹⁴ On this genre and its main themes see Déroche, 'L'Authenticité de l'"Apologie contre les Juifs"', discussing its purpose at pp. 668–9.

⁹⁵ See N. Gendle, 'Leontius of Neapolis: a seventh century defender of holy images', *Studia Patristica*, 18 (1985), pp. 135–9.

⁹⁶ See Averil Cameron, 'Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Search for Redefinition', in J. Fontaine and J. Hillgarth, eds, *The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity* (London, forthcoming).

⁹⁷ See, e.g., *Trophies of Damascus*, ed. G. Bardy, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 15 (1927), pp. 169–292, at p. 221.

⁹⁸ Leontius of Neapolis, PG 93, col. 1604B.

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reverence of material objects such as the Cross is an important part of John of Damascus's apologia for images; he links reverence of the Cross explicitly with such material signs of the death and resurrection of Christ as the rock of Calvary, the tomb, and the stone.⁹⁹ The Jews may have accused Christians of idolatry, but the Christian argument itself was about signification, what signified, and how.

Whatever else it may have been, Byzantine Iconoclasm was certainly an argument about the correct representation of God. According to the Iconoclasts, only certain signs were to be allowed, principally the Eucharist, the 'one true image' of God.¹⁰⁰ They thus claimed it for themselves, while denying the legitimacy of other signs favoured by their opponents. This is why actual icons and figural decoration in churches were destroyed, whitewashed, or replaced. Needless to say, the Iconoclast argument, including Constantine V's understanding of the Eucharist, was hotly rebutted.¹⁰¹ Both sides in the controversy, however, drew on the arguments of the preceding century. One such was a renewed stress on the suffering of Christ in the flesh, that is, in his human and physical form, which constituted a major concern of late seventh-century Eastern theology, and which now also began to manifest itself in the late appearance in Byzantine art of representations of the dead Christ on the Cross.¹⁰² Again, the emphasis is on materiality; Christ suffered in the body, not symbolically. But this posed major Christological problems: in which nature did Christ suffer? Theopaschites and others who wished to restrict his suffering to one nature only were now again formally condemned.¹⁰³ The two natures had to be realized somehow in every part of the divine economy, and in every portrayal of it. It is obvious that any picture of Christ would raise the issue of exactly what it was that was represented,

⁹⁹ Scorn for matter is represented as a Manichaean error: *Oratio* II.13, Kotter, 3, p. 104; PG 94, col. 1300B, cf. 1245B (other material signs; see n. 77 above).

¹⁰⁰ As argued in the *Peuseis* of the Emperor Constantine V: see S. Gero, 'Notes on Byzantine Iconoclasm in the eighth century', *Byzantion*, 44 (1974), pp. 23–42; 'The eucharistic doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and its sources', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 68 (1975), pp. 4–22.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., Nicephorus, *Antirrhētics*, II.2: PG 100, col. 333B–D, usefully tr. with notes M.-J. Mondzain-Baudinet, *Nicéphore, Discours contre les iconoclastes* (Paris, 1990).

¹⁰² See the discussion by Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis. The Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 33–60; Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', p. 39. Interestingly, a miniature in the Chludov Psalter (ninth century) shows the figure of Pseudo-Dionysius as a witness to the Crucifixion, illustrating the text of Ps. 45.7, 'Nations may be in turmoil and thrones totter'; see Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, p. 134.

¹⁰³ Theopaschism, condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553, was also condemned in 691–2 (canon 81, see below), and at the Second Council of Nicaea, 787.

over and above the existing doubts about materiality in relation to the objects themselves.

These worries also showed themselves in other ways. The greatest theologian of the seventh century, Maximus Confessor, composed scholia on the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius, and emphasized symbolism and mystery in his own work on the liturgy, the *Mystagogia*. The practice of commenting on and interpreting the liturgy was taken up again on the eve of Iconoclasm by Germanos I in his *Historia ecclesiastica*.¹⁰⁴ By this time, however, a new strain of realism is evident, with an emphasis on the human and physical aspects of the life of Christ signified in the Eucharist; undue emphasis on symbolism was reined in by stressing the realistic details of the Incarnation, as in canon 82 of the Council in Trullo, where symbolic representations of Christ are forbidden.¹⁰⁵ Behind this, there seems to have been something of a move in the direction of Antiochene literalism in reaction against an over-symbolic theory of interpretation. It was a long-standing difference; the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, condemned by the Fifth Council, nevertheless provided the basis for this more literal reading.¹⁰⁶ The Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–1, which condemned Monothelitism, laid a heavy emphasis on the human nature of Christ and his existence on earth in the flesh, while the passage in Anastasius of Sinai already cited, insisting on material representations rather than mere words, may belong to the period shortly before.¹⁰⁷ In his *De haeresibus*, Germanos argued that the human representation of Christ was necessary in order to remember his life in the flesh, his suffering, and

¹⁰⁴ Germanos's exposition of the meaning of the Eucharist also follows in the tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius, and draws on Maximus. The Migne text of his *Historia ecclesiastica* or *Historia mystagogica* (PG 98, cols 384–453) is late and interpolated, but the original can be reconstructed from other versions, including the Latin translation of Anastasius Bibliothecarius: see R. Taft, 'The Liturgy of the Great Church: an initial synthesis of structure and interpretation on the eve of Iconoclasm', *DOP*, 34–5 (1980–1), pp. 45–76, and on the Ur-text, R. Bornert, *Les Commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1966), pp. 125–42; for the extant versions see *CPG*, 3, 8023, and see J. Meyendorff, *On the Divine Liturgy* (*Historia ecclesiastica*), ed. and tr. (Crestwood, NY, 1984); for Maximus's *Mystagogia*, see J. Stead, ed. and tr., *The Church, the Liturgy and the Soul of Man: the Mystagogia of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Still River, Mass., 1982).

¹⁰⁵ On the development from Pseudo-Dionysius to Germanos see Taft, 'The Liturgy', p. 58, and cf. pp. 67ff., with p. 71 on Maximus; see also Barber, 'The Koimesis Church, Nicaea'. Cf. also the similar emphasis in the Acts of II Nicaea, Mansi, 13, 288C–E: the coming of Christ in the flesh justified the place of the material in the divine economy against the Iconoclast view that matter was evil (280D).

¹⁰⁶ For a brilliant short exposition of the implications of Antiochene literalism versus Alexandrian allegory see H. Chadwick, 'Philoponus the Christian Theologian', in R. Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus* (London, 1987), pp. 42–6.

¹⁰⁷ Sixth Council: see Barber, 'The Koimesis Church'; Anastasius: above, n. 28.

his death, and maintained that rejection of the Sixth Council implied rejection of all the rest,¹⁰⁸ while the argument of his *Historia ecclesiastica* contains an emphatic reading of the Eucharist as a memorial of Christ's passion and death, and the gifts at the Great Entrance as signifying the body of the dead Christ, and employs a realism which Father Taft compares to the realism of visual art.¹⁰⁹ This was certainly a political as well as a religious dispute: the Sixth Council, with its emphasis on the humanity of Christ, had been emphatically rejected by the Emperor Philippicus (711–13), who had even removed a depiction of it from the imperial palace, provoking the Pope to set up an image of the Six Councils in St Peter's.¹¹⁰ It is a sign of the twists and turns of ecclesiastical and political life in the period that the same Germanus who now supported the Sixth Council so warmly is listed by Theophanes as being among Philippicus's supporters.

But the issue of symbolism versus literalism was a real one. It was not a matter of mutually exclusive alternatives, but rather of achieving the right balance; the symbolic interpretation of church buildings and of the liturgy itself, which is characteristic of this period, did not preclude an emphasis on the materiality of the buildings or the divine elements. The iconophiles indeed rested part of their case for images on the argument of the Pseudo-Dionysius about the efficacy of material aids towards religious understanding.¹¹¹ The attention paid by writers of this period to the interpretation of the elements of the Eucharist, also material signs until transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, is part and parcel of the debate. Thus when the Iconoclasts claimed the Eucharist as the only true image of Christ, they were paradoxically appropriating a eucharistic emphasis which was already a major feature of the thought of the supporters of images and the sources on which they depended; both Iconoclasts and iconophiles alike had to find ways of explaining the eucharistic elements in relation both to materiality and to representation.

It is not surprising that Byzantines of the same period were also worried about what was actually represented by the classical statues which still survived, especially in Constantinople itself.¹¹² When the exact nature of

¹⁰⁸ PG 98, cols 80A, 81B.

¹⁰⁹ Taft, 'The Liturgy', p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Theoph., *Chron.*, anno mundi, 6203, pp. 381–2, de Boor; *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris, 1886–92), s.v. Constantine I (708–15); Herrin, *Formation of Christendom*, p. 312.

¹¹¹ See Bishop Kallistos, 'The Meaning of the Divine Liturgy', pp. 12–15; Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', pp. 65–7.

¹¹² See Mango, 'Antique Statuary'; Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Eighth Century*, intro., pp. 31–4.

what was depicted in religious pictures had become such a matter of attention and controversy, it was only natural that representations of pagan gods and mythological characters should become a major anxiety, especially when their very identification had often been forgotten. It was tempting to ascribe magic powers to them, or to believe that they had been bewitched.¹¹³ Lurking behind this fear of ancient statues is the same suspicion of idolatry which was directed at religious images; thus in the eighth-century *Parastaseis* Christian emperors are credited with destroying pagan statues, and the pagan Emperor Julian with tricking people into venerating idols in the guise of imperial images.¹¹⁴ Whatever powers that ancient statues might possess, nobody imagined that they could be beneficent. The historical past, even the reign of Constantine, had receded into half-remembered fantasy.¹¹⁵ As for classical statues, if a picture of the Virgin and Child, or someone's favourite saint, was now suspect, how much more suspect were Apollo and Aphrodite? The story of a mosaicist whose hand was struck by a demon as he tried to remove a depiction of Aphrodite exactly expresses how people felt.¹¹⁶ If nothing else, Iconoclasm demonstrated that the representation of Classical Antiquity no longer had a place in medieval Byzantium.

IMAGES AS GUIDES TO TRUTH

The 'rise of icons' and the attack made on them by the Iconoclasts have received a vast amount of attention in histories of Byzantium. I have tried to show that one way of reading both is in relation not just to 'society', or to theology, or to the disasters of the seventh century, but in relation to the intellectual and imaginative framework of contemporary society. A massive intellectual adjustment was necessitated by the final demise of the classical world and the new circumstances of the early medieval one.¹¹⁷ As

¹¹³ Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Eighth Century*, intro., p. 33.

¹¹⁴ *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, chs 53, 57, 47, ed. Th. Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, 1 (Leipzig, 1901, repr. New York, 1975); cf. Cameron and Herrin, eds, *Constantinople in the Eighth Century*, p. 33.

¹¹⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 34ff. But not only as the discoverer of the True Cross but also as the founder of Constantinople as a Christian city, contrasted with another imperial builder, the pagan Emperor Septimius Severus, Constantine also acquired a new prominence; see also Cameron, 'Byzantium in the Seventh Century'.

¹¹⁶ Eustratius, *Vita Eutychii*, 53, PG 86.2.2333, tr. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 133-4.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Dagron, 'Le culte des images', p. 143: 'un long processus d'acculturation, au cours duquel la Byzance chrétienne apprend ce qu'elle eut revendiquer de son passé romano-hellénique et ce à quoi il lui faut renoncer.'

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the traditional systems crumbled, the nature of truth and the foundations of knowledge were themselves called into question. We can see this sharply confirmed by the extreme concern for the citation of genuine texts and authorities shown at the councils of 680–1 and 787. Which authorities one should accept was precisely the issue.¹¹⁸

Truth being redefined as religious knowledge, images were seen by many as one, though only one, of the ways by which access to this truth was possible (see colour plate 2). They occupied this privileged position not least because of the long struggle in Christian thought to find a language by which God could be represented and in relation to the emphasis placed by writers such as the Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus, and Germanos on symbolic interpretation and revelation through signs. But they also raised fundamental issues about matter and about what they could actually be held to represent, in a period concerned about charges of idolatry and still dominated by basic Christological issues. The same Quinisext Council which sought to regulate the visual representation of religious subjects also laid down stricter principles for the celebration of the Eucharist, condemned surviving pagan practices, and anathematized those who upheld the addition of the words 'who was crucified for us' to the Trisagion as implying that God could suffer on the Cross.¹¹⁹ The regulation of images ran parallel to the regulation of behaviour and doctrine as part of the closer definition of the truth. As the Christological arguments of the seventh century centred on the exact definition of the physical life and suffering of Christ, so religious images began to be seen as a means of demonstrating doctrine even more exactly than could be done in words; their potential in this regard is explicitly defended in the powerful argument put by Anastasius of Sinai to which I have already referred, according to which pictures are a more effective way of convincing people of true doctrine than quotations from the Scripture and the Fathers.¹²⁰

The Iconoclastic movement in Byzantium is a perfect illustration of how history proceeds by the convergence of multiple factors, all of which

¹¹⁸ For a similar process at work in the late sixth century see Cameron, 'Models of the Past'.

¹¹⁹ Canons 73 (Cross not to be used to decorate floors), 82 (Christ not to be represented as a lamb, but in human form, so as to remember the physical suffering of Christ in the flesh); 23, 28, 29, 31, 32, 58, 70 (women must be silent during the liturgy), 83, 101 (Eucharist); 57, 61, 62, 65 (pagan practices; many other canons regulate custom, dress, and entertainment); 81 (Trisagion). On canon 81, condemning Theopaschism, see Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Above, n. 28; Anastasius's argument also appears in the context of an attack on Theopaschism.

must be given their due. One can read post-Iconoclastic Byzantine art as the vindication of the sign-system which images implied.¹²¹ But I hope to have shown that we must overlook either the place of images in the intellectual framework which had evolved as a replacement for the secular tradition, or the fact that they were seen as representing truth. 'Icons are equivalent to writing';¹²² they claimed to be part of the grammar of Byzantine representation. It was hardly surprising that this flight to icons created as many problems as it seemed to solve, but one is sometimes inclined to forget that in the long run the defenders of icons won out, and the system of which icons formed a part was confirmed.

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¹²¹ Brubaker, 'Byzantine art in the ninth century', deals mainly with the art of the ninth century in this light.

¹²² Abu Qurrah, *De cultu imaginum*, 13.